

Region 7 Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)
Meeting Minutes
July 29, 2013

FWP Staff Present: Brad Schmitz, John Ensign, Mike Backes, Cathy Stewart, Jack Austin, Erin O'Connor and Pete Travis

CAC Members Present: Glenn Heitz, Bill Klunder, Bob Gilbert, Gary Sparks, Dale Kreiman, Mark Frisinger, Ed Bukoskey, and George Luther

CAC Members Absent: Ed Joiner and Bob Hagedorn

Introduction: Cathy Stewart started the meeting by welcoming everyone and summarizing the plan for the meeting. She then went over the agenda and asked the CAC members and FWP staff to introduce and tell a little bit about themselves, and why they want to be involved with the CAC.

Ed Bukoskey is from Rosebud. He is a Bow Ed instructor and has served on numerous FWP committees. He is currently serving on the FWP Elk-Brucellosis committee.

Mark Frisinger is from Richey. He enjoys the outdoors of all kinds and thought it would be interesting to be on this committee.

Dale Kreiman is from Lindsay. He loves the outdoors and wildlife and feels this is a committee that will be good for voicing public concerns.

Gary Sparks is from Plevna. He is a retired teacher who is still ranching. He is interested in the Department and how it works.

George Luther is from Miles City and has a real estate appraisal consulting management company. This is his second term on this CAC as he was a member of the previous group.

Glenn Heitz is from the Terry area and is a rancher who has been involved in the Block Management program.

Bill Klunder is from Terry. He is a recently retired sheriff who is now working as a meat processor. He wants to be involved with this group as he has a strong passion for the outdoors.

Bob Gilbert is from Sidney. He is a former legislator and is still active as a lobbyist. He is involved with Walleyes Unlimited. He is currently part of the License Funding Advisory Committee (LFAC) and was formerly part of the Region 6 CAC.

Background of CAC's: Brad began by discussing the value and history of CAC's. CAC's have become popular in many government agencies. Some FWP CAC's have been around for a long time. CAC's seem to have varying degrees of effectiveness, which can likely be attributed to the people involved and what their thoughts and concerns are. Our CAC depends on us, what we want to do and where we want to go with it. Director Hagener instituted CAC's during his first term about 10 yrs ago. This region started our committee with Bryce Christensen, former Regional Supervisor. However, since then we have had a lot of turnover and some budgetary issues. This led to our CAC being put on hold for a while. All of our current CAC appointments will last for two years. Brad is grateful that everyone is here and is looking forward to everyone's input.

One of Brad's goals today is to give the committee an idea of how we work, what our mission is, who we are accountable to, and how our processes function. Hopefully members will understand how things work or don't work sometimes. His other goal is to have members understand on a local basis what staff we have, what our abilities and limitations are, what our basic program direction is, and what our goals are at this level. He would also like to have some open discussion about things on that are on members' minds and concerns that they may have.

CAC Charter: This is some basic ground rules and process for the CAC. Brad would like members to fully understand what they're getting involved with and in what their abilities are or aren't. A CAC is an advisory committee composed of key citizens that can help the Department achieve its goals, and serves two functions. Those functions are to provide the agency with information, ideas, and emerging trends and initiatives from the public, and to provide a vehicle for FWP to inform key citizens with the expectation that they will in turn take the information to the broader public.

Brad then discussed the position of the CAC. CAC members do not have Commission powers and he wants folks to understand the difference between those roles. CAC members can have influence and discussion with staff members and Commissioners, though.

The job of the CAC is to help the Department function, to provide a vehicle to inform citizens, to serve as a communication avenue for collecting information, ideas and initiatives from the public, provide a collaborate environment with the expectation that committee members will in turn inform the broader public. In regards to expected outcomes, the CAC will advise FWP on various regional and statewide programs and policies, identify areas where the Department can be more effective and offer insight and guidance for members, as well as help identify emerging issues and trends, resolve conflicts, act as FWP ambassadors, be a sounding board and may recommend actions and priorities. CAC members will act as FWP ambassadors to various interest groups and geographic communities.

How Does FWP Function?: Brad discussed the mission and vision of this agency.

Mission: FWP, through its employees and citizen commission, provides for the stewardship of the fish, wildlife, parks and recreational resources of Montana, while contributing to the quality of life for present and future generations.

Vision: FWP will provide the leadership necessary to create a commitment in the hearts and minds of people to ensure that, in our second century, and in partnership with many others, we will sustain our diverse fish, wildlife and parks resources and the quality recreational opportunities that are essential to a high quality of life for Montanans and our guests.

Brad then mentioned how things have changed since he came to the agency. Many staff was older and has since retired, taking with them a lot of institutional memory. There has been a tide of younger staff that has replaced them and brought a lot of energy and fresh thinking to the agency.

FWP is accountable to the FWP, Director, Governor, Environmental Quality Council (EQC), Legislative Body (individual legislators, two legislative committees, house Natural Resource Committee, Senate Fish & Game Committee), the public, and nonresident guests and interests. The Commission is a governor-appointed group of five individuals from diverse backgrounds. They usually hold two or four-year terms. The Director is also appointed by the governor. Contact with members' local legislators is encouraged. A lot of our efforts involve talking to the public and explaining how our programs work, how we do things, how biology works and lots of discussions about opportunities. A large part of our budget comes from nonresident guests.

How is FWP Funded?: Brad moved on to discuss funding and current related issues facing the Department. Funding and budget are both big issues. When we have good times we see expansion; when we have bad times we see contraction. On average, we have to ask for a license fee increase every ten years. The majority of our funding comes from license dollars. Those dollars are matched against federal aid dollars from the Pittman-Robertson (PR) Act and Dingell-Johnson (DJ) Act. PR and DJ funds are excise taxes from hunting gear, ammo, etc. These funds go into a pot of funds that is then allocated out to states based on their needs and population size. We are independent in our funding

but still have to pass our budget through the Legislature. We have asked for fee increases in the last ten years and have gotten partial approval. We got a nonresident fee increase most recently. These partial approvals bump our budget up a little bit, but are not a cure-all. If we don't have something by 2015 the Department will be in the red, which it cannot do by state law. That would lead to cuts and reductions in force.

The Governor and the Director put together a committee this year to look at funding options. Bob was on that committee. Brad asked Bob to give members a review of the LFAC. Bob said that the LFAC members were appointed from across the state. It was a good committee made up of a broad spectrum of people with fishing, hunting and boating concerns. The committee started last August and met every month through June of this year. They talked about lots of things to figure out how to give the Department the money it needs but not hammer the public at the same time. The committee felt that ten years is too long to wait for a fee increase cycle and recommended a four-year cycle. Their recommendation was from the committee to the Department, to the Governor and then to the Legislature.

The committee felt another big issue was the free and discounted licenses. These licenses amount to \$4.5 million per year, so they recommended cutting a lot of those out. For the licenses the committee opted to keep, they suggested that rather than being free or discounted, customers should pay 50% of normal price. The only licenses they decided to leave the same were the military licenses, based on certain criteria. Some adjustments to the Come Home to Hunt and Nonresident Montana Native licenses were also suggested. The committee also recommended changing the Senior license age from 62 to 67 and changing the prices to 50% of normal license instead of free. Bob is available for any questions surrounding the LFAC and their recommendations.

Brad then continued discussing funding. The LFAC's recommendations still have to go through the process i.e. the legislature, get approval, signed by the governor, etc. If the Department gets a fee increase, our funding will bump back up. If we don't get approved for a fee increase, we will have to look at some cuts. He encouraged members to pay attention to the funding cycle as we approach and go through the legislative session.

How is FWP Structured?: Brad showed an organizational chart for FWP and described the different levels and divisions and what each is responsible for. In order for members to understand how the agency processes, he wanted them to be aware of how it's organized. We are a public trust agency that's entrusted to manage the public's fish and wildlife. Brad then showed an organizational chart for Region 7 and mentioned who is responsible for each division and what that division is comprised of. He then asked if there were any questions about our basic agency functions, why we do things the way we do, who we account to, how we're funded, etc.

Ed asked how Parks is funded. Brad responded by saying that they are mostly funded by user fees and a little bit of federal funding. Cathy added that they also receive some funding from tourism and bed tax fees and coal tax fees.

Program updates:

Fisheries

Mike Backes, Regional Fisheries Manager, began by saying that the Fishing Access Site program (FAS) and Parks separated in 2011. Consequently, Fisheries inherited FAS's on top of other responsibilities and management. Fisheries and the Hatcheries are two separate programs. Fisheries is responsible for management of the actual populations out on the landscape. The Hatchery staff is separate in that they manage everything on hatchery grounds and respond directly to Helena. Fisheries works with the

Hatcheries in that they decide what needs stocked where and makes those formal requests to the Hatchery, who then follows up with the actual stocking.

Mike then showed a map of what area Region 7 Fisheries covers. Fisheries districts are basically aligned by watershed. Region 7 covers essentially everything from the mouth of the Bighorn River east, south of Ft Peck reservoir, and east of the Musselshell River. The Tongue, Powder and Yellowstone Rivers are our big rivers. Fisheries also spends time managing some of the region's larger reservoirs such as Gartside, Castle Rock, South Sandstone and Tongue River Reservoirs. Fisheries staff also dabbles in prairie streams. Region 7 has 108 ponds/reservoirs that we manage the fishery in, and Mike listed the number of those in each county.

Mike ended by briefly discussing staff and their related responsibilities. The FAS program has two permanent employees – the Program Manager and the Maintenance Manager – as well as two seasonal maintenance workers and three caretakers. On the Fisheries Management side there is two biologists, a full-time technician, and four to five seasonal staff members.

There is 22 FAS's in this region, three of which are on ponds or reservoirs and 19 along the various rivers. In 2011 we experienced a high water year that caused a lot of damage and consequently, additional activity associated with maintaining FAS's. This spring brought a lot of ice jams and ice scour that's causing substantial increased workload for the FAS crews. We estimated approximately \$300,000 in damages through the FEMA program from this spring's flooding and ice damage, just from Glendive downstream.

On the management side, the winter months are usually spent attending meetings, processing data and writing reports. At springtime, an assessment of ponds is done to determine any winterkill and stocking requests. If the Hatchery doesn't have the necessary fish to restock some ponds, those species must be trapped and restocked ourselves. Tagging of sauger in the river is done in April and May and June is dedicated to paddlefish harvest at Intake FAS. The pallid sturgeon program operates mainly from April through June and is done primarily by the Glendive Fisheries biologist and his staff. Trend sampling at Tongue River Reservoir is done in late July and was added when coal bed methane started to become an issue. The seasonal technicians who work with the ponds program do so from late June through August. Yellowstone River trend sampling is done in August through October on five different trend areas. Fisheries also manages permitting for various things including private ponds, commercial bait seining and hoop nets. They also work with local Conservation Districts on 310 permitting for landowners who want to do any stream bank modifications.

Wildlife – John Ensign, Regional Wildlife Manager, stated that Region 7 makes up 20% of the state's land mass and is about 39,000 square miles. In this region, 76% of land is privately owned, 14% is controlled by BLM, 6% is State land and about 3% is the Custer National Forest. We have quite a diversity of habitat types including plains grassland, riparian areas, plains forest, and badlands. Ninety-four percent of the region supports mule deer and 30% supports whitetail. The vast majority of land is native range and is highly productive. Deer hunting generates \$10 million in revenue to small communities out here. Southeast Montana functions on several basic wildlife management principles. Wildlife management is the art and science of making land produce a sustainable crop of wildlife for recreational use.

John then discussed the Wildlife staff. The division has nine permanent folks consisting of five biologists including John, a nongame biologist, the Block Management Coordinator and his administrative assistant, and an upland game bird biologist, which is currently being recruited for. There are also 13 seasonal Block Management technicians. There have been a lot of new folks in the Wildlife division in recent years.

Wildlife program management objectives here are based on what the land can support and maintaining healthy, productive wildlife populations and supplying public recreational opportunities. Biologists spend a lot of time surveying populations. Elk are doing well and their distribution is expanding across the region. Deer numbers are down due to tough winters and disease-related issues. Regionally, populations are about 10% below the long-term average. Mule deer have seen some good recruitment this last year. Antelope were 50% below the long-term average this time last year; biologists are currently conducting this year's surveys. This region supports 15% of the state's deer hunters and accounts for about 25% of the state's mule deer harvest and 10% of the state's whitetail harvest. We support about 31% of the state's antelope hunters and account for about 36% of the state's antelope harvest. We support about 3% of the state's elk harvest, although that is increasing.

Access is the most limiting factor for reaching harvest objectives. Access has been an issue since the mid-'70's. Increasing and improving public access has been a major focus in the region for a long time. Our Block Management program is probably one of the most popular programs in the state and started here in about 1985. Currently, that program has approximately 2.5 million acres and 342 landowners enrolled. It provided 66,000 hunter days and saw about 35,000 hunters last year. Other access programs focused on in this region are Access Public Lands and Open Fields, as well as public access signing projects.

Another major focus here is habitat. The two main programs that we employ for that are Habitat Montana and the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement program. Habitat Montana is basically our easement program, which we have five easements with landowners in this region. Those easements encompass approximately 64,000 private land acres. We also have four large Wildlife Management Areas – Amelia Island, 7 Sisters, Elk Island, and Isaac Homestead.

Enforcement – Jack Austin, Warden Captain, began by referencing the Enforcement staff in this region. There are nine field wardens, one captain, one sergeant, and one investigator that cover 13 counties. To be a warden a person has to be at least 20 years of age, a U.S. citizen, have a Bachelors degree, and be in excellent physical and mental condition.

Jack then discussed warden duties. Being a warden really is a way of life. Wardens are on call 24 hours/day, seven days a week. They work a lot but there is flexibility in their schedules. He showed a list of duties that wardens typically perform, but added that the list is many and they never know what might come up.

In 2013, Region 7 wardens contacted about 3000 anglers and 2000 hunters, investigated 231 wildlife cases, made 471 Parks user contacts and 389 boater contacts, conducted 661 residency investigations, attended 861 hours of training, and made 812 landowner contacts. Jack then gave some explanation of license fraud and residency cases which are a big issue in this region.

About 80% of Enforcement funding comes from fishing and hunting license dollars. For the most part Pittman-Robertson funds can't go towards enforcement; wardens usually get those funds for urban wildlife activities. Wardens handle a large variety of wildlife-related calls ranging from injured animals, wildlife in places they shouldn't be, etc.

In 2013, Region 7 wardens issued 368 tickets, 208 written warnings, and 289 verbal warnings. Fifty percent of fines go to the associated counties and the other 50% goes to the state general fund.

Comm Ed – Cathy Stewart, Information and Education Program Manager, described her division as a clearinghouse for information on FWP activities. Her division is a contact point for people or entities requesting information about FWP business, including state and national media. The division publishes the Montana Outdoors magazine. It also administers the Hunter Ed and Bow Ed programs, the shooting

range development program, boating safety, the Becoming an Outdoor Woman programs, youth education programs, and is a resource for teachers and students of all ages.

So far in the region this year, there has been 12 Bowhunter Education classes consisting of over 108 students and 19 Hunter Education classes that have served 476 students. Currently, there are 32 volunteer instructors. Seven Kids Fishing Days have been held across the region serving 733 kids so far this year. There has been an additional 22 educational programs that have reached 616 students and teachers.

Cathy then provided some background and explanation of her eagle cam project. There were many organizations and individuals involved with installing a camera on a local eagle nest this spring. The camera monitored two eagle chicks and became immensely popular with a broad spectrum of people. Comm Ed is also responsible for the regional Facebook page, publishing news releases, and acts as a contact point for local press.

Open Discussion

Brad asked folks what their thoughts and ideas were or if they had anything wanted to present to the committee.

Bob – He found interesting how fines are distributed. He doesn't like that the state general fund gets half; counties should be receiving more. He intends to talk to some legislators about this. He has been following the proposal on wolf licenses where non-consumptive users could buy licenses, and doesn't understand why we have to have a rule or law for that. He feels we need to watch this issue closely. He also believes aquatic invasive species is going to become a bigger issue and warrants paying close attention to.

Bill – Feels he has a vested interest in wildlife since he does it as a hobby and as a member of a sportsman's club, and because his business depends on hunting season at times. He is interested in where FWP is going with different species, particularly elk and wolves. He has noticed more Northern Pike in the river. He has a little understanding of the law enforcement side of the Department having worked with Jack in the past. He is curious to see where he can help out.

Glenn – He doesn't have any bones to pick, and just wants to learn. He would like to see the opportunity to hunt and fish with a younger generation. A lot of places are losing that because of a lack of access. He was one of the first Block Management cooperators in the region, as was Dale.

George – He feels his second term is going to be interesting knowing what he knows from his first term. He hears of a lot of wardens leaving and going and doing something else with their lives. He believes working with enforcement is important. He knows the Department is facing some major issues including wolves and bison, but also sage grouse. This is particularly a huge issue for this area. Access issues are perpetual. He thinks some work between DNRC and FWP could solve some access issues down the road. Intake and the Yellowstone River endangered species and impact to irrigation is a complex issue that a lot of people overlook. He has been involved with the urban deer management plan in the Colstrip area. He believes urban wildlife is going to become a bigger issue.

Gary - It's interesting to see what all the different divisions do. He feels the bottom line in the long run is going to be funding. He thinks there's some opportunities to help the Department get some funding to be able to do what it needs to do. He also thinks in the next few years there may be some opportunities for county commissioners to help us out.

Dale – If there's one issue that he would like the committee to look at it would be the reputation of the Department. It's a sad situation to him. He has no beef to pick with anyone but the Department does not have a good reputation with the public. The committee should focus on building reputations with landowners, sportsmen, the public and the legislature. He has seen both positive and negative moves made in that direction and would like to discuss why they were that way. He also has some thoughts on sage grouse when the opportunity arises. Season lengths are an issue he hears a lot about. He would like to see better relationships between us and the public, which is why he joined the committee.

Mark – He has been interested in wildlife and what the Department does for as long as he can remember. He enjoys hunting and fishing and wants to preserve those activities for his own grandkids and hopes the committee will be a way to help do that.

Ed – He has been on a couple other FWP committees including the elk archery committee and brucellosis working group. Politics seem to be a big part of what happens in the Department. The reputation of the Department has gone downhill and is going to take a while to get back. He is also currently on the BLM's Resource Advisory Committee. Sage grouse is going to be a big situation. He also helped worked on the warden wage issues and was highly disappointed with the outcome.

Brad then summarized what he thinks may be good topics for the next meeting. There has been a lot of talk about sage grouse. He would like to have the Director and possibly some Helena Wildlife folks assist with discussing this topic. Glenn mentioned that BLM seems to do a lot of prescribed burns lately, which seems to get rid of a lot of sage grouse in a hurry. Brad agreed and said we will be dealing with the current sage grouse issues for years to come. Another possibility could be the reputation of the agency since it has come up a lot. If necessary, we could have a longer meeting time.

Dale mentioned that whenever there are public meetings, attendance is low. One way to perhaps get more people to attend would be to have open-house style meetings with food. He has attended the Block Management cooperator dinners in both Glendive and Miles City and there is always hundreds of people at those events. Those types of events are immensely popular. Brad agreed and said one thing we'd like to work on is getting back to more of a community-based process.

Bob added that he saw lots of sage brush spraying in the Gillette area when he lived there years ago. That's one of the problems we have with habitat; we poisoned it. The other side of the story was talk about how hard the energy and mining industry is on wildlife. He has seen wildlife in energy areas, seemingly unfazed. There are a lot of things to watch out for as the truth isn't always told. He learned as a legislator and lobbyist that the first thing you do is go to the people that are going to be impacted. Be sure to include both sides of issues.

Brad closed the meeting by deciding on a tentative date and time. He thanked everyone for attending.

Next meeting: Wednesday, January 7, 2015, 10 – 2 p.m. (tentatively). Lunch will be provided.